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WAR MACHINE®

BROTHERS IN ARMS REUNION WITH HAWKEYE™, BLACK WIDOW™ & U.S. AGENT™

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CLAD IN HIS AWESOME, SILVER AND BLACK BATTLE ARMOR, JAMES RHODES STOOD READY TO COMBAT THE EVILS OF INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION WHEREVER THEY APPEARED. NOW THAT ARMOR IS GONE, AND JIM RHODES HAS BEEN GIVEN THE ASTONISHING WARWEAR SYSTEM... IN TIME TO FACE THE GREATEST TEST OF HIS LIFE!

YOU THINK YOU KNOW A MAN.

YOU WORK ALONGSIDE HIM FOR YEARS.

YOU SHARE IN HIS DEEPEST SECRET.

A HUNDRED DIFFERENT WAYS AT A HUNDRED DIFFERENT TIMES, YOU SAVE EACH OTHER'S LIVES.

YOU THINK YOU KNOW A MAN.

AND THEN YOU FIND OUT THAT MAYBE, AFTER ALL THAT, YOU DON'T.

AND IT HITS YOU LIKE A--

WHAMMM!

BROTHERS IN ARMS

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MESA VIENTO AIRSTRIP, CALEXICO. LONG BEFORE DAWN.

TONY! NO! YOU--

OH.

I TUMBLE OUT OF THE NIGHTMARE PUNCHING AND SWEARING. TAKES ME A MOMENT TO REMEMBER WHERE I AM.

HAWKEYE AND AGENT ARE STILL SNORING ON THEIR COTS. AT LEAST I DIDN'T WAKE THEM.

IN THE PRE-DAWN LIGHT I LOOK AT THEIR FACES AND ENVY THEM, SLEEPING LIKE BABIES. ME, I'M IN A COLD SWEAT, AND THE **WARWEAR MANDALAS** ON MY SKIN ARE BURNING LIKE **ICE**.

DON'T HAVE TO BE A CARD-CARRYING FREUDIAN TO ANALYZE THAT DREAM. TONY STARK AND I HAVE A LONG AND COMPLICATED HISTORY, AND THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS HAVE SENT A SHOCKWAVE BOOMING THROUGH THOSE MEMORIES.

IF ONLY I COULD...

YEAH, FINE.

SORRY... DID I WAKE YOU, NATASHA?

I WAS UP ALREADY. I'M HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING... LIKE **YOU**, I GUESS.

JIM? ARE YOU OKAY?

WHAT TIME IS IT?

STILL EARLY, JUST PAST FIVE.

WHY DON'T YOU COME AND GET SOME FRESH AIR? I'VE GOT TO GO CHECK ON THE SENTRY UNITS.

I FOLLOW THE **BLACK WIDOW** THROUGH THE DERELICT OUTER OFFICE AND INTO THE DESERT AIR.

THIS OLD 'DROME WAS ABANDONED 'BOUT TWENTY YEARS AGO. ONLY SAND, SAGEBRUSH,AND SPIDERS HAVE TAKEN UP RESIDENCE SINCE THEN.

UNTIL WE CAME ALONG. THREE **"BROTHERS IN ARMS"** AND AN HONORARY **SISTER**. RUNNING SCARED, LYING LOW, AND TRYING TO FIGURE OUR NEXT MOVE.

WE CHOSE THE PLACE AT RANDOM. IT WAS MILES FROM ANYWHERE, UNOBTRUSIVE, AND CONTAINED A CORRUGATED STEEL ZULU BARN BIG ENOUGH TO HIDE A **STOLEN** HEX SHIP AND A **BORROWED** QUINJET.

DO YOU THINK WE'LL BE SAFE HERE, JIM?

DEPENDS ON *WHO* COMES LOOKING. UNTIL WE KNOW EXACTLY WHO FRAMED HAWKEYE FOR THOSE MURDERS, WE'LL BE JUMPING AT *EVERY* SHADOW.

AGENT DISABLED THE TRACER UNITS ON THE HEX SHIP AND QUINJET, SO THEY CAN'T FIND US *THAT* WAY. HE ALSO TOOK HIS *FORCE WORKS* STUD AND YOUR *AVENGERS IDENTICARDS* AND *BURIED* THEM IN A CASH BOX DEEP IN THE GROUND.

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO APPLAUD HIS RESOURCEFULNESS OR WORRY ABOUT HIS *PARANOIA*.

THAT'S CALLED *"LEADING THE WITNESS,"* 'TASHA. WE DON'T *KNOW* IF IT'S STARK THE MAN OR EVEN STARK *THE CORPORATION*. ALL I KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT *BOTH* HAD THE OPPORTUNITY AND ABILITY TO MANUFACTURE A *FRAME* THIS PERFECT.

SO UNTIL I SEE SOME *HARD EVIDENCE*, I WON'T ACCUSE THE GUY. I *CAN'T*. IT'S NO MORE CREDIBLE THAN *CLINT* BEING A KILLER.

YOU'D HAVE DONE THE SAME THING THOUGH, *WOULDN'T* YOU? THE CARDS, THE STUD, THE TRACERS... THEY'RE ALL *STARK* TECHNOLOGY, AFTER ALL.

NATURALLY. BUT MORE THAN THAT. IT WAS FOR TONY, FOR MYSELF, FOR THE AVENGERS.

I'M SURE YOU KNOW ABOUT MY *CHECKERED* EARLY CAREER. NATASHA ROMANOV, SOVIET SPY, FEMME FATALE... ALL THAT *NONSENSE*. BACK THEN, TONY AND CLINT WERE BOTH... *ENEMIES*, BUT THEY HELPED ME, TRUSTED ME, AND EVENTUALLY BROUGHT ME INTO THE AVENGERS FOLD.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO PERSUADE *ME*, JIM. I DON'T THINK IT'S TONY *EITHER*. I GO BACK A LONG WAY WITH HIM, TOO.

I KNOW AND LIKE ME, *YOU CAN'T SLEEP*. MAYBE I WAS JUST TRYING TO PERSUADE *MYSELF*.

CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION, 'TASHA? WHY DID YOU COME HERE? WAS IT FOR CLINT'S SAKE?

THAT'S A HECK OF A DEBT TO PAY BACK. AND NOW, THE AVENGERS SEEM TO BE FALLING APART. THEY'RE MY ADOPTIVE FAMILY, JIM. THEY REPRESENT *EVERYTHING* I ASPIRE TO.

EVERYTHING THAT I VALUE, INCLUDING MY TWO *OLDEST* FRIENDS. I'LL FIGHT FOR THAT... EVEN IF IT MEANS BECOMING AN *OUTLAW* IN A LONELY PLACE LIKE THIS.

OH, *LISTEN* TO ME! *SO MELO-DRAMATIC!*

HANG ON WHILE I CHECK THE SENTRY RODS.

THEY ALL SEEM TO BE WORKING. AT LEAST WE KNOW WE WON'T BE *CAUGHT NAPPING*.

FOR *NOW*, MAYBE . BUT WE SHOULDN'T STAY IN *ONE PLACE* FOR TOO LONG.

COME SUNRISE, LET'S SCOUT FOR A *NEW* BOLT-HOLE,. AND THEN WE SHOULD WORK OUT WHO WE CAN CONTACT FOR HELP. *WANDA* SPRINGS TO MIND...

UNTIL THEN, WHY DON'T I DO AN AERIAL SWEEP OF THE AREA TO *DOUBLE CHECK* OUR SECURITY?

DO YOU WANT TO USE THE QUINJET?

UH... *NO.*

LOOK, THERE'S SOMETHING I SHOULD TELL YOU. CLINT AND JACK KNOW *ALREADY.* YOU KNOW I LOST MY OLD ARMOR...

PASSHH

BOZHE MOI ...!

... I GOT A *NEW* SUIT. IT'S CALLED *WARWEAR.*

AND BELIEVE ME, NOW YOU KNOW AS MUCH AS *I* DO ABOUT IT.

OUR LITTLE SECRET, *RIGHT?*

YOU BET.

GET BACK SOON. I'LL WAKE THE OTHERS AND WE CAN MOVE OUT BEFORE LIGHT.

*SHE HANDLED THAT WELL. **VERY** COOL. I CAN SEE WHY SHE'S BEEN HEADING THE AVENGERS FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS.*

*I LET THE DESERT WINDS CARRY ME UP TO FIVE HUNDRED FEET, AND THEN I CRUISE 'ROUND IN A LONG, **SLOW** CIRCUIT.*

*MY ALIEN EYES CUT THROUGH THE DARKNESS. I CAN SEE EVERY SHRUB, EVERY COYOTE, EVERY RODENT, **EVERY** GRAIN OF SAND.*

*I CAN SEE THE SHAPE, HEAT, AND **SPEED** OF THE AIR LIKE IT WAS DRAWN ON A **CONTOUR** MAP.*

I CAN EVEN SEE THE EXACT MINERAL COMPOSITION OF THE LAND BELOW ME.

*I JUST WISH I COULD SEE WHO WAS OUT THERE, IN THE DARK, **SCREWING** WITH OUR LIVES.*

NATASHA WATCHES HIM GO UNTIL HE'S LOST IN THE STARS. THEN SHE HEADS BACK TO THE OLD 'DROME OFFICE.

BEHIND HER, THE DESERT SIGHS A MURMURING WIND AS DRY AS CACTUS AND ROUGH AS QUARTZ.

THEN IT BEGINS.

A POCKET OF AIR **BLISTERS AND POPS,** UNFOLDING A FIGURE THAT STEPS OUT OF **NOWHERE.**

THE SENTRY PODS FEEL THE SLIGHT CHANGE IN AIR PRESSURE. SUDDENLY **ALERT,** THEIR HYPERSENSITIVE ELECTRONICS GROPE FOR DATA.

THEY SENSE THE FIGURE. ALARM PROTOCOLS ENGAGE. IN A **MICROSECOND,** THEIR SIRENS WILL SCREAM.

A GESTURE, A TOUCH.

THE SIRENS FUSE, **MUTE.** THE PODS BECOME DEAF, BLIND, **DUMB** FILES OF SCRAP.

DEATHUNT TO STRIKE *FIRETEAM DECIMAL FOUR.* TARGET AREA IS SECURE. YOU MAY OPEN THE TEMPORTAL.

TEMPORTAL TRANSFER COMPLETE. WE STAND READY.

TACTICAL ANALYSIS.

FOUR MAIN STRUCTURES: AIRCRAFT HANGAR, POWERHOUSE, MAINTAINENCE SHED AND OFFICE/DWELLING. HEAT-BLEED SUGGESTS TWO VEHICLES PARKED IN HANGAR. LIFESIGNS INDICATED IN OFFICE/DWELLING.

GOOD. ASSUME FLANKING FORMATION AND FOLLOW ME IN. INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THE RENEGADE, HAWKEYE, IS IN THE COMPANY OF ONE LOW-POWERED SUPERHUMAN AND ONE STANDARD HUMAN.

BE ***WARNED***--THEY ARE ***AVENGERS*** AND THEREFORE TENACIOUS. BUT THEY HAVE NO REAL FIREPOWER, OR THE ***GUTS*** TO BE RUTHLESS ENOUGH TO WIN A ***FIGHT TO THE DEATH.***

WE, HOWEVER, ARE AUTHORIZED FOR ***MAXIMUM SANCTION.*** SAFETIES OFF. LET'S SHOW THEM HOW IT'S DONE.

I KNEW THE SMELL OF COFFEE WOULD BRING *YOU* ROUND.

YYOOOOOOOGH!

SURE DID, 'TASHA. MUST BE THIS CLEAN DESERT AIR. OR *EXTREME FATIGUE*. ONE OR THE OTHER.

AGENT'S STILL SNORING BACK THERE. HAVE YOU SEEN JIM?

SLEEP WELL?

HE'S OUT SCOPING THE PERIMETER.

THAT'S QUITE A... *NEW LOOK* JIM'S GOT, ISN'T IT?

OH, *THAT*. YEAH... TAKES A BIT OF GETTING USED TO, HUH?

BLACK WITH ONE?

I'M *FLATTERED* YOU STILL REMEMBER. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE YOU LAST FIXED ME *BREAKFAST*.

YOU KNOW, 'TASHA, IT'S SO *GREAT* TO--

WHOOOOM

IN THE BACK ROOM, JOHN WALKER WAKES WITH A START.

EXPLOSION. NOT IN HIS DREAM, NOT IN HIS HEAD, BUT OUT THERE.

HE CAN SMELL THE FLAMES AND THE AFTERWASH OF SUPERHEATED PLASMA.

TODAY, HE'LL HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE THAT POINT.

KA-BOOM!

HIS PULSE RATE HIKES. HIS ADRENALINE GUNS LIKE HIGH-OCTANE FUEL. HE DOESN'T CALL OUT. EVERY GOOD SOLDIER KNOWS NOT TO GIVE HIS POSITION AWAY TO THE ENEMY.

TARGET LOCATED. TARGET LOCKED.

AND JOHN WALKER IS AS GOOD A SOLDIER AS THEY COME.

AGENT DIVES CLEAR, DANCING THROUGH THE LASER STORM.

HIS PHOTON WEAPON ROARS IN RESPONSE.

NEARBY...

THE RENEGADE. FALLEN ALREADY.

I HAD HOPED FOR A *CHALLENGE*. THIS IS *TOO* EASY...

ZZZkrooom!
AGHH!
YOU'LL FIND THERE'S *NOTHING* EASY ABOUT THIS WHILE I'M STILL *BREATHING!*
GET AWAY FROM HIM!
HEADS UP, WIDOW! THAT S.O.B.'S POINT MEN ALMOST *SMOKED* YA!
GUESS WE SHOULD NEVER HAVE ORDERED THAT *WAKE-UP CALL*, HUH?
CHOOM!
HOW CAN YOU *JOKE*, AGENT? THEY'RE TRYING TO *KILL* US!
HEY, LADY... IF YOU CAN'T FLIP DEATH THE *BIRD*...
KRAKK!
... THEN YOU MIGHT AS WELL PICK OUT YER *CASKET* NOW!
LIGHTS OUT, FREAK-FACE!

ATTENTION, STRIKE TEAM! I HAVE IDENTIFIED AN ADDITIONAL TARGET, ONE SUPERHUMAN FEMALE.

FIRETEAM SUPPORT REQUIRED AT MY LOCATION NOW!

WIDOW! GET BARTON OUTTA HERE! MY SHIELD WON'T HOLD OFF THIS JOKER FOREVER!

BUT--

CUTE THOUGH YOUR "BUT" IS, I DON'T WANNA HEAR IT! AMSCRAY, NOW!

STRIKE TEAM! I REPEAT! FOCUS MAIN ASSAULT ON MY LOCATION AND -- NUGHH!

HEY, BOZO! I GOT YER MAIN ASSAULT RIGHT HERE!

NATASHA ROMANOV GRABS CLINT BARTON'S DEAD WEIGHT AND HAULS HIM THROUGH THE EXPLODED SIDE-WALL OF THE OFFICE AREA.

BEHIND HER, SHE HEARS JACK DANIELS SNARL IN PAIN.

BUT THERE'S NO TIME TO TURN BACK AND OFFER HELP.

DEATH IS OUT HERE, TOO.

CAUTION

TWIN TARGETS FIFTY METERS WEST DESTROY THEM

I'M TWENTY KLICKS FROM MESA VIENTO WHEN THE DAWN COMES UP.

THE DESERT FADES FROM MAUVE TO PINK AND THEN THE SUN SLIDES OVER THE MOUNTAINS. WHAT A VIEW.

REMINDS ME OF MY MARINE DAYS, FLYING COPTERS OFF THE L.Z. AT SUNRISE. SEEMS SO LONG AGO.

I ARCH MY SPINE AND PULL A BAT-TURN, HEADING BACK.

THAT'S WHEN I SEE IT. A FAKE DAWN IN THE WEST. A FLAME-GLOW PAINTED BRIGHT ACROSS MY VISOR.

MY HEART GOES COLD.

TRACK IN, TRACK IN, BLAST IT!

FULL MAGNIFICATION... OH, MY GOD. THE AERODROME.

I GO "WEAPONS HOT," UNSKINNING MY DRONES, AND DROP DOWN LOW ACROSS THE CANVAS, ULTRA-FAST.

THE WHITE-HEAT BURN ON MY IMAGE INTENSIFIERS IS NOTHING COMPARED TO MY RAGE.

OUR UNKNOWN FOE HAS FINALLY SHOWN HIS HAND. IN A WAY, I SHOULD BE RELIEVED. IT'S WHAT I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR.

BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT'S ON MY MIND RIGHT NOW...

MESA VIENTO...

THEY'RE ALL AROUND HER, CUTTING THE AIR WITH PENCIL-THIN NEEDLE LASERS, TRYING TO RIP HER APART.

SHE HEARS THE SPITTING WHINE OF THEIR WEAPONS AND THE GUTTERAL CURSES OF THEIR SYNTHESIZED VOICES.

ANY SECOND NOW, HER LIFE WILL END. SHE MAKES EVERY SECOND COUNT.

SHE DODGES THE BLASTS, SMASHING THROUGH REINFORCED PLASTIC, SHATTERING CERAMIC ARMOR, BREAKING BONES.

UGHHNN!

ENDGAME, WOMAN. CLOSE YOUR EYES. I WILL MAKE IT PAINLESS.

SHE WILL NOT GIVE UP. SHE W--

GO S-

NATASHA ROMANOV LOOKS UP AND SEES WAR MACHINE DROPPING LIKE A **THUNDERBOLT** FROM THE SKY.

NATASHA COUNTS JIM AS A **FRIEND**, THOUGH SHE BARELY KNOWS HIM. IN HER EXPERIENCE, HE IS A CALM, KIND MAN, OPEN AND GENEROUS, WITH A SOFT, **GENTLE** VOICE THAT IS FULL OF REASSURANCE AND **HONESTY**.

NOW SHE BARELY RECOGNIZES HIM.

THE CYBORGS SHOW NO FEAR. THEY DON'T **UNDERSTAND** THE CONCEPT.

THEY FALL BACK, LAYING DOWN **BLINDING SWATHES** OF COVERING FIRE.

THE ALIEN **WAR MACHINE** BANKS 'ROUND THROUGH THE BLOSSOMING FLAMES AND SENDS THEM TUMBLING LIKE TWIGS IN A **CYCLONE**.

AND THEN, WITH FISTS SHOD IN SOME **UNEARTHLY ALLOY**, HE FOLLOWS THROUGH.

WEAPONS LOCK I HAVE HIM

OTHERS, PROGRAMMED TO BE DUTIFUL TO THE END, STAND THEIR GROUND...

MORE FALL.

HE FALLS LIKE A **DEMON**, SOME **ALIEN BEAST**, THE BIO-ENGINEERED TECHNOLOGY AROUND HIS LIMBS AND TORSO PULSING WITH AN INCANDESCENT **INFERNO** AS HE RIPS THROUGH THE CYBORG RANKS.

AND SHE HEARS, ABOVE THE WAIL OF PLASMA CANNONS, A SONG HALF SCREAMED... A SONG OF **VICTORY**, AN ALIEN HYMN TO **WARFARE**... COMPOSED ON SOME DISTANT, **DARK** WORLD.

JIM RHODES'S VOICE IS SINGING IT.

NATASHA SUDDENLY FEELS GLAD HE'S ON **HER** SIDE.

THUDOOM! THUDOOM! THUDOOM!

FINISHED? GOOD. *MY* TURN.

THUNCH!

NATASHA! WHERE ARE HAWK AND AG-- OH, NO! *NO!*

THIS ONE PUT UP A VALIANT FIGHT, BUT NOW HE IS FINISHED. STRIKE TEAM! REPORT! GIVE ME AN UPD--

IN THE NAME OF THE CONQUEROR! WHO IS THIS?

CLINT! CLINT! WAKE UP !

KILLERS. AND I RECOGNIZE THEIR LEADER FROM THE AVENGERS FILES.

HIS NAME IS DEATHUNT. HALF MAN, HALF MACHINE.

NONE OF THIS ADDS UP.

WHY THE HECK WOULD SOME ROBOTIC FREAK WANT TO FRAME ME? WHAT POSSIBLE GOOD WOULD IT DO HIM?

OH MAN, WHAT HIT US?

KRUNCHH!

A CYBORG?!

I *MEAN*... IF YOU'RE A FUTURISTIC TECHNO-KILLER, WHY WOULD YOU BOTHER FRAMING A NO-CONSEQUENCE GUY LIKE ME? COULD HE HAVE BEEN SENT BY SOMEONE ELSE? WAIT, WASN'T DEATHUNT INVOLVED WITH--

CLINT, SHUT UP!

NO SHUT UP AND *LOOK!* JIM'S IN REAL *TROUBLE!*

HEY, I WAS JUST *SPECULATING*...

THE WAR HYMN HAS FALLEN SILENT. RHODES YELLS WITH PAIN AS THE CYBORG'S FIST PUNCHES HIM THROUGH THE HANGAR WALL.

SYNTHETIC FINGERS CLOSE AROUND HIS THROAT...

... FOR I HAVE FOUND AN OPPONENT I AM *PROUD* TO KILL!

WAR MACHINE HURTLES DOWN THE HANGAR LENGTH, SNAPPING THE HEX SHIP LANDING STRUTS AS HE SMASHES THOUGH THEM.

BUT HE ROLLS CLEAR AS THE MASSIVE CRAFT SLAMS DOWN, MISSING HIM BY MERE INCHES...

YOU'VE MADE IT ALL *WORTHWHILE*, STRANGER. YOU'VE MADE THIS BATTLE *WORTH* THE FIGHTING.

NOW I AM *GLAD* I WAS SENT ON THIS MISSION...

YOU SAID IT, YOU JUNK-PILE PSYCHO! WE *AVENGERS* JUST DON'T KNOW WHEN TO GIVE UP, DO WE?

TO THE *LAST*, YOU SAID... AM I RIGHT?

YOU ARE TENACIOUS! JUST AS I HOPED! LIKE ALL AVENGERS, YOU FIGHT TO THE *LAST*...

ch-THOOOM!

AGHHHHHHH!

WELL, *FRIEND*... THE LAST STARTS ABOUT *HERE*.

I'M NOT AN AVENGER, NOT A FORCE WORKER, NOT ANY OF THAT.

I'M CALLED *WAR MACHINE*.

I'VE A FEELING YOU KNOW WHY.

AND ALL THIS WAR MACHINE WANTS TO KNOW IS...

... WHO SENT YOU!?!

YOU SHOULD HAVE KILLED ME WHILE YOU HAD THE CHANCE!

AGHHHHHH!

WHH-

CHINKK!

HE'S RIGHT, JIM. YOU *SHOULD* HAVE KILLED HIM WHILE YOU HAD THE CHANCE.

HAWKEYE!

THE EVER POPULAR. NOW STEP *BACK* WHILE I GIVE THIS GEEK A FEW POINTERS ABOUT *CO-OPERATION*.

MISSION ABORT! ABORT! ACTIVATE EMERGENCY TEMPORTAL!

TZZZZZK!

RRWLPPPPPPP!!

THANKS FOR THE SAVE, CLINT, BUT IT REALLY WASN'T NECESSARY.

MAYBE I JUST FELT LIKE *CUTTING LOOSE*.

GEEZ, THEY'VE ALL *VANISHED!* AND WE WERE SO CLOSE TO FINDING OUT WHO'S ON THE *OTHER SIDE* OF THE CURTAIN.

I JUST WANT TO KNOW WHO WE *MATTER* TO SO MUCH THAT THEY WANT US *DEAD*.

WE'RE CLOSE TO THAT ANSWER, CLINT--

WE'RE STILL IN THE DARK! COME ON, JIM... THIS WAS NO Q-&-A SESSION! THIS WAS A *BRING YOUR OWN BODY-BAG* PARTY!

WE'VE GOT ONE BIG LEAD! I SAY WE USE IT NOW, WHILE WE'RE STILL *WARM*.

COOL DOWN, BARTON. THERE'S NO WAY WE'RE GOING TO FRONT UP TONY YET. WE'VE GOT NO PROOF, AND BESIDES, IT WOULD LEAVE US *WIDE OPEN*.

WE'LL DESCUSS THIS LATER. THERE'RE *OTHER* PRIORITIES RIGHT NOW...

... LIKE STRIKING CAMP AND GOING TO *GROUND*.

AND FINDING *AGENT*. FAST AS YOU CAN, JIM. WE DON'T KNOW HOW BADLY HE'S HURT.

COME ON, CLINT. YOU KNOW JIM'S RIGHT.

THAT SO, HUH?

SHEVA JOSEPH'S APARTMENT, LOS ANGELES...

THE NEW DAY DAWNS AFTER A NIGHT OF TALKING... OF SPECULATION, AND **FEARS.**

SHIELD AGENT **KIRBY MARTELL** IS IN THE KITCHEN, BREWING COFFEE FOR THE **THIRD** TIME SINCE SHE ARRIVED LAST NIGHT.

MARTELL'S SPECIALIST FIELD IS **TEMPORAL MECHANICS.** NICK FURY BROUGHT HER IN ON A RECENT OPERATION IN **CHILE.***

* SEE WM'S #15-17. -- NEL FURY

IT WAS THERE THAT SHE MET JAMES RHODES AND SHEVA JOSEPH FOR THE FIRST TIME, AND HELPED TO DIAGNOSE AND TREAT THEIR POST TIME-JUMP FATIGUE. LAST NIGHT SHEVA, **EX-SHIELD** HERSELF, CALLED FOR HELP AGAIN.

ON THE WAY HOME FROM CHILE, YOU SAID THE TIME FATIGUE MIGHT HAVE **LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES.** IS THIS ONE OF THEM?

SHEVA HAS BEEN SUFFERING FROM **TACTILE HALLUCINATIONS.** SHE SEEMS TO BE SLIPPING BACK AND FORTH THROUGH **TIME.**

MARTELL HUMS SOFTLY, TRYING TO SOUND CHEERFUL. IN TRUTH, ANXIETY GNAWS AT HER. TEMPORAL MECHANICS IS ALMOST ENTIRELY **THEORETICAL.** SHE'S NEVER HAD TO DEAL WITH A PROBLEM LIKE THIS.

A PROBLEM WHERE A LIFE COULD BE AT STAKE.

HARD TO SAY. THIS IS A FLEDGLING BRANCH OF PHYSICS. WE DON'T HAVE MUCH EXPERIENTIAL DATA TO WORK FROM.

IS THAT WHY YOU RUSHED OUT HERE? AM I AN *"INTERESTING CASE"?*

PLEASE. DON'T THINK THAT. I WANT TO HELP YOU, AND *FURY* DOES, TOO. HE GAVE ME LEAVE TO COME HERE WITHOUT HESITATION.

KIRBY... IT HAPPENED AGAIN, JUST NOW. WHILE YOU WERE IN THE KITCHEN.

I BLINKED, AND I WAS AT COLLEGE AGAIN. NINETEEN YEARS OLD.

I'M SO SCARED.

THAT OLD *SOFTIE.* AFTER ALL I PUT HIM THROUGH...

I KNOW YOU ARE, BUT EVERY-THING'S GOING TO BE *FINE*.

DRINK THIS. WE'LL HAVE SOME BREAKFAST AND THEN I'LL DRIVE YOU TO THE SHIELD FACILITY AT BAKERSFIELD FOR SOME TESTS TO--

--OHH! SHEVA... *SHEVA!*

KISHH!

KIRBY? WHAT IS IT? WHY ARE YOU LOOKING AT ME LIKE THAT?

PLEASE... KIRBY... *ANSWER* ME...

MESA VIENTO...

YOU WERE LUCKY.

SO WHY DON'T I *FEEL* LUCKY?

THAT CREEP WIPED THE FLOOR WITH ME.

YOU KEPT DEATHUNT BUSY FOR QUITE A WHILE, JACK. THAT'S NO *MEAN FEAT.*

NOW SIT STILL WHILE I GET A MED-SCANNER FROM THE QUINJET AND--

VSOOOOOOM!

THAT QUINJET, YOU MEAN?

OH, *NO.*

DO I GET A PRIZE FOR GUESSING WHO JUST BUGGED OUT ON US?

THOUGHT NOT.

YOU GUYS KNOW WHERE HE MIGHT BE GOING?

I'VE A *NASTY FEELING* WE DO...

OH, CLINT...

... YOU *IDIOT.*

NEXT:

SHOWDOWN:

THE BATTLE YOU'VE ALWAYS ASKED TO SEE (AND ALWAYS HOPED WE'D NEVER SHOW) THIRTY DAYS. TWO OLD FRIENDS. ONE WINNER.